

II.

ON VARIOUS SUPERSTITIONS IN THE NORTH-WEST HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS OF SCOTLAND, ESPECIALLY IN RELATION TO LUNACY. BY ARTHUR MITCHELL, A.M. AND M.D., DEPUTY COMMISSIONER IN LUNACY FOR SCOTLAND, CORR. MEMBER SOC. ANT. SCOT., &c.

Innis Mārē.

In the autumn of last year, while in the neighbourhood of Loch Maree, which has been truly described, "in its barrenness and loneliness, as the most utterly savage and terrific of any part of this land of mountain and flood,"¹ I heard much of the marvellous virtues of a well on one of the smallest of the many richly-wooded islands which rise in clusters out of its waters, and which so soften the grandeur and wildness of the scene, as to make the eye, resting on that part of the Loch, see nothing in it but an exquisite picture of calm beauty. So much was told to me of the power "unspeakable in cases of lunacy"² possessed by these waters, that I resolved to satisfy curiosity by a visit. This was accomplished on the 14th of August,³ when I had the advantage of being accompanied by Professor Brown of St Andrews, the Minister of the parish, and a boat's crew of old residents. I shall briefly narrate what I saw and heard.

Eilean Maree or Innis Maree,⁴ is a small low island, with clean, gravelly shores, half way down the Loch, not more than a quarter of a mile in its greatest diameter.

On its highest part there is an enclosure, whose outline is an irregular oval (90 × 120 feet). The wall, which is not more than 2 feet high, is now covered with earth and moss. Pennant, however, describes it as a "stone dyke, with a regular narrow entrance."⁵ In the centre of this enclosure there are the remains of a small chapel; but so complete is the ruin that it is not possible to determine the style of architecture. Round about the chapel are fifty or sixty graves, generally covered by a flat undressed stone, with rude blocks at the head and feet. Many of

¹ Anderson's Highlands, 1834, p. 567.

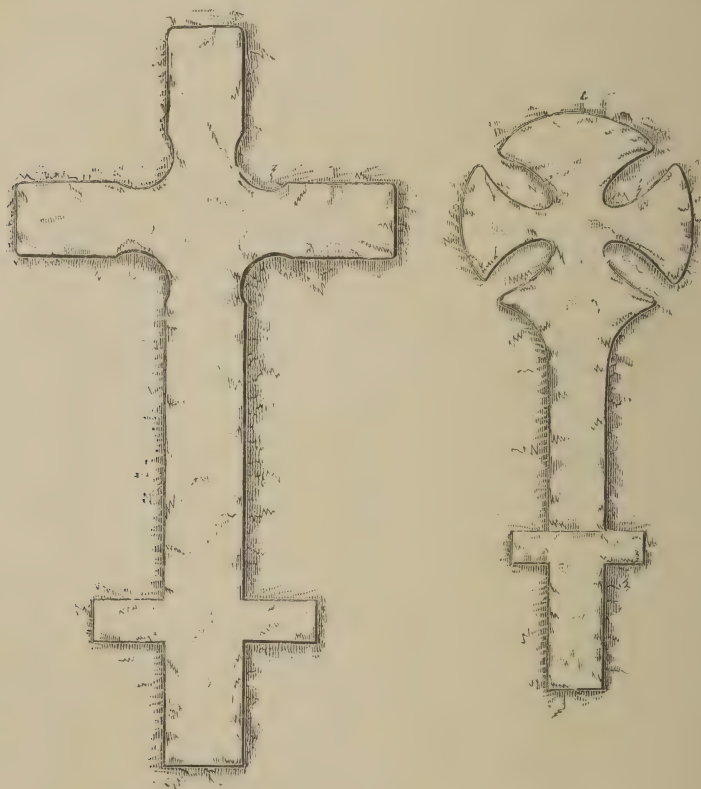
² Pennant's Tour in Scotland, 1774, p. 330.

⁴ Properly Innis or Eilean Mhaolrùibh.

³ 1859.

⁵ Pennant, *op. cit.*, 303.

these graves are recent. One, indeed, is quite fresh—the burial having taken place but a week before my visit. Several of the older ones are said to contain the bodies of the *Sassunnach* artizans who, in the seventeenth century, worked at the iron furnaces of Poolewe.¹ With two exceptions, there are no cuttings, carvings, or inscriptions on any of the



tombstones. These two have distinct and well-formed incised crosses on them, drawings of which are here given. The stones on which these

¹ A bar of pig-iron, found during some diggings on the site of these furnaces has been placed in the Museum of Scottish Antiquities by the author.

occur have never been dressed or even squared. They are flat, and lie beside each other, nearly end to end, and about east and west.

The celebrated well, whose waters are of such magic power, is near the shore. We found it dry, and full of last year's leaves. It is a built well, and the flat stone which serves for a cover we found lying on the bank.

Near it stands an oak tree, which is studded with nails. To each of these was originally attached a piece of the clothing of some patient who had visited the spot. There are hundreds of nails, and one has still fastened to it a faded ribbon. Two bone buttons and two buckles we also found nailed to the tree. Countless pennies and halfpennies are driven edge-ways into the wood,—over many the bark is closing, over many it has already closed. All the trees about the well are covered with initials. A rude *M*, with an anchor below it, tells of the seaman's noted credulity and superstitious character. Two sets of initials, with a date between, and below a heart pierced by an arrow, probably record the visit of a love-sick couple, seeking here a cure of their folly. The solitary interview would probably counteract the working of the waters.

The sacred holly grows everywhere on the island. We found it loaded with fruit. The oak, the larch, the alder, the beech, the mountain-ash, the sycamore, the willow, the prickly holly, the dog-rose, the juniper, the honeysuckle, and the heather all abound, and form a most charming grove.

Various traditions exist regarding this little island. Several were told to me. A love story is the foundation of all. I shall narrate the one which connects the spot directly with lunacy.

A Norwegian princess awaited the arrival of her lover on Inch Maree, where they were to be married by the hermit. The bridegroom was to land at Poolewe, and on his safe arrival it was agreed that a white flag should be shown. He came, sound in heart and limb, but, out of frolic, or to test his sweetheart's love, he caused a black flag to be hoisted. She saw it, went mad, and after a few years died, and was buried on the island. He outlived her but a short time, and found his grave by her side. The two stones, of which I have spoken, are said to mark their resting place. Since the same tale is told with many variations, it is probable that something of this kind did really happen; but that the

virtues of the well have any connection with the story is improbable, as I shall shortly show.

Anderson, Fullarton, the New and Old Statistical Accounts, as well as the people of the place, derive the name from a dedication to St Mary. This remarkable error is first clearly pointed out in the "*Origines Parochiales*," though Pennant evidently had the right view when he speaks of it as the favoured isle of the saint (St Mareē), the patron of all the coast from Applecross to Lochbroom, and tells us that *he*, the saint, is held in high esteem, and that the oath of the country is by his name.¹

It appears that Maelrubha came from Ireland to Scotland, and founded the Church of Aporcrossan in 673.² After his death he became the patron saint of the district. His name is variously known as Malrubius, Malrube, Mulray, Murie, Mourie, and as the last corruption, Maree.³ That the island and loch bear the name of this saint there can be no doubt. Even the mode of pronouncing the word by the Gaelic-speaking population shows that it is not derived from *Mary*,⁴ while Pennant's remark

¹ Pennant, *op. cit.*, 330.

² *Origines Paroch.*, ii. 402; and Irish Eccles. Journal, 1849—Rev. Dr Reeves.

³ When writing this paper in December 1860 my information regarding Maelrubha was derived from the "*Origines Parochiales*," and from a communication to the "*Irish Ecclesiastical Journal*," by Dr Reeves in 1849. Since that time I have had the advantage of seeing a very elaborate and learned paper on the History and Churches of St Maelrubha by Dr Reeves, which appears in a recent volume of these Proceedings, and which removes all possible doubt as to the origin of Inis Mareē. As I do not go minutely into this subject, I have scarcely altered what I read to the Society.

The extracts from the Presbytery Records, which are afterwards given, are of interest, as showing that about the middle of the seventeenth century the Saint's day was, in the district where his Saintship was earned, popularly fixed as the 25th of August, and not the 21st of April or 27th of August. They are further of interest as showing that about the same period St Ruffus and St Maelrubha appear to have been regarded as identical, and that not only was Cronlinbeg formerly called "*St Ruphus's Island*," but Inis Maree itself is, in 1678, spoken of as the "*Island of St Ruffus*."

An old man in the district told me that the name was originally Eilean-Mo-Righ (the Island of my King), or Eilean-a-Mhor-Righ (the Island of the Great King), and that this king was long ago worshipped as a god in the district.

⁴ This struck me forcibly. Dr Reeves attaches considerable importance to it.

proves that the mistake is not yet a century old. Names are monuments—pages of history—inscribed stones—yet thus do we find them broken, blotted, and defaced. Mourie died at Applecross on the 21st April 722.¹ There is some doubt as to where he was buried, and I have nothing to make it probable that it was in Inch Maree. It is certain, or all but certain, however, that this *Vir Dei* led a hermit's life, and wrought miracles there; and that, like St Goderick, St Fillan, and a host of others, he continued to do so after his death.

Whether the Saint, on his arrival in Scotland, found a pagan temple on this little island, or whether he himself first consecrated the spot, is a question of interest. Pennant says, "I suspect the Dike to have been originally Druidical, and that the ancient superstition of paganism was taken up by the Saint as the readiest method of making a conquest over the minds of the inhabitants." This opinion I am inclined to adopt. The people of the place speak often of the *God Mourie*, instead of *St Mourie*, which may have resulted from his having supplanted the old god. Tradition also points to it as a place of worship before the Christian epoch, and the curious record I have obtained of the sacrifice of bulls there, strongly confirms this belief, and furnishes fresh proof of the liberal engrafting upon Christianity of all forms of paganism in the early history of the Church. The man, who accompanied me as driver in the district, happened to be a person of intelligence, and it was he who first informed me, that in the Presbytery Records some allusion was made to the superstitions of Loch Maree. On reaching Dingwall, I applied to the Rev. Mr Kennedy, who most kindly gave me further information and copies of some quotations which he had himself made. I am indebted, however, to the Rev. Dr Maclean, of Kiltearn, for full extracts, which by a curious accident he made on the Saint's day. As these have never yet been laid before the public I shall give them in full :—

" *At Appilcross 5 Septemb: 1656.*

" Convened Mr Joⁿ M^ccra, Moderator, Mr Joⁿ Monro, Mr Thomas Hogg,
Mr Joⁿ M^cKillican, Mr Donald Fraser, Mr Donald M^ccra, Mr Rorie
M^cKenzie, Mr Alex^r M^cKenzie, and Mr Donald Ross,

" The name of God Incalled. *Inter alia*, The Minister being in-

¹ Orig. Paroch., ii. 402.

quired be his brethren of the maine enormities of the parochin of Lochcarrone and Appilcross, declaires some of his parochiners to be superstitious, especiallie in sacrificieing at certaine tymes at the Loch of Mourie, especiallie the men of Auchnaseallach; quho hes beine summoned, cited, bot not compeiring, execution is lawfullie given be the¹ kirk officer of Lochcarron, quhose names ar as followes: Donald M^cconill chile—Murdo M^cFerq^{re} vic conill eire—W^m M^cconil eire, Gillipadrick M^rorie—Duncan M^cconill uayne vic conill biy—Alex^r M^cfinlay v^c conill diy—Donald M^ceaine roy vic choinnich—Johne M^cconill reach—Murdo M^ceaine roy—Murdo M^ceaine voire v^c eaine ghlaiss—Finlay M^cGilliphadricke.—Ordaines the kirk officer to chairge these againe to compeire at Dingwall the third Wednesday of October nixt—recommend that thaire Minister compeire the said day at Dingwall, and that he preach at the vacand kirk of Urquhart, the ensuing Lord's day he is in the country.

“The said day the presbytrie of Dingwall, according to the appoyntment of Synode for searcheing and censuring such principalls, and superstitious practices as sould be discovered thaire—haveing mett at Appilcross, and findeing amongst uther abhominable and heathenishe practices *that the people in that place were accustomed to sacrifice bulls at a certaine tyme uppon the 25 of August, which day is dedicate, as they conceive, to S^t Mourie as they call him; and that there were frequent approaches to some ruinous chappels and circulateing of them; and that future events in reference especiallie to lyfe and death, in takeing of Journeyis was exspect to be manifested by a holl of a round stone quherein they tryed the entering of their heade, which (if they) could doe, to witt be able to put in thair heade, they exspect thair returning to that place, and failing the considered it ominous; and withall their adoring of wells, and uther superstitious monuments and stones, tedious to rehearse*, Have appoynted as followes—That quho-soever sall be found to commit such abhominaciones, especiallie Sacrifices of any kynd, or at any tyme, sall publickly appear and be rebuked¹ six several Lord's dayis in six several churches, viz.: Lochcarron, Appilcross, Contane, Fottertie, Dingwall, and last in Garloch paroch church: and that they may, uppon the delatatione

¹ Word not legible.

of the Sessione and minister of the parochie, he sall cause summoned the guiltie persone to compeire before the pbrie, to be convinced, rebuked, and there to be injoyned his censure, And withall that the session sould be charged to doe thair dewties in suppressing of the foresaid wickedness, and the foresaid censure in reference to thair sacrificing to be made use of in case of convict, and appeiring, and evidences of remorse be found, and failing, that they be censured with excommunicatione.—Ordaines the minister to exercise himself with his people in such manner as at his coming to Appilcross, once in the five or sax weekes at each Lord's day of his coming, he stay thrie dayes amongst his people in catechising a pairt of them each day, and that he labour to convince the people of their former error, by evidenceing the hand of God against such abominations as hes beene practised formerlie.—Appoynts M^r Alex^r M^cKenzie to informe the presbiterie of any strangers that resorts to thease feilds as formerlie they have to thair former heathenishe practices, that a course may be taken for their restraint.

“KENLOCHEWE, 9 Sept^r 1656. *Inter alia.*, Ordaines M^r Alex^r M^cKenzie, minister at Lochcarron, to cause summond Murdo M^cconill varchue vic conill vic Allister in Torriton, and Donald Smyth in Appilcross, for sacrificing at Appilcross—to compeire at Dingwall the third Wednesday of October, with the men of Auchnaseallach.

“The brethren taking to their consideratione the abominations within the parochin of Garloch *in sacrificing of beasts upon the 25 August, as also in pouring of milk upon hills as oblationes* quhose names ar not particularly signified as yit—referres to the diligence of the minister to mak search of thease persones and summond them as said is in the former ordinance and act at Appilcross 5 Sept: 1656, and withall that by his private diligence he have searchers and tryers in everie corner of the countrey, especiallie about the Lochmourie, of the most faithful honest men he can find; and that such as ar his elders be particularly poseit, concerning former practices in quhat they knowe of these *poore ones quho ar called Mourie his devilans and ownes thease titles, quho receaves the sacrifices and offerings upon the accompt of Mourie his poore ones*; and that at laist some of thease be summoned to compeire before the pbrie the forsaid day, until the rest be discovered; and such as heve boats about the loch to transport themselves or uthers to the Ile of

Mourie, quherein ar monuments of Idolatrie, without warrand from the superiour and minister towards lawful ends; and if the minister knowes alreaddie any guiltie, that they be cited to the nixt pbrie day, and all contraveners thereafter, as occasione offers in all tyme comeing.—The Brethren heiring be report that *Miurie hes his monuments and remembrances* in severall paroches within the province, bot more particularly in the paroches of Lochcarron, Lochalse, Kintaile, Contan, and Fottertie, and Lochbroome, It is appoynted that the brethren of the congregations heve a Correspondence, in trying and curbing all such, within their severall congregations. And for thease that comes *from forren countreyis*, that the ministers of Garloch and Lochcarron informe themselves of the names of thease, and the places of their residence, and informe the pbrie thereof, that notice may be given to those concerned.

“DINGWALL, 6 August 1678. *Inter alia*, That day Mr Roderick Mackenzie minister at Gerloch, by his letter to the prebrie, declared that he had summoned by his officer to this prebrie day Hector Mackenzie in Mellan in the parish of Gerloch, as also Johnie Murdoch, and Duncan Mackenzies, sons to the said Hector—as also Kenneth M^cKenzie his grandson, for sacrificing a bull in ane heathenish manner, *in the iland of S^t Ruffus, commonly called Ellan Moury in Lochev*, for the recovering of the health of Cirstane Mackenzie, spouse to the said Hector Mackenzie, who was formerlie sicke and valetudinarie:—Who being all cited, and not compearing, are to be all summoned againe pro 2^o.”

KILTEARN, 27th August 1860.—Extracted from the Old Records of the Presbytery of Dingwall by

ALEX^R. MACLEAN, D.D., *Pby-Clk*.

Fuller wittily observes, that as careful mothers and nurses, on condition they can get their children to part with knives, are contented to let them play with rattles, so the early Christian teachers permitted ignorant people to retain some of their former foolish customs, that they might remove from them the most dangerous.¹ Fuller is here writing of protesting times; but if we go back to the first introduction of Christianity into our country, we shall find that many pagan cere-

¹ Fuller's Ch. Hist. p. 375; and Brand, "Pop. Antiq." lxi.

monies were connived at, and engrafted on the new religion, which we, now-a-days, should feel inclined rather to class with edged tools than rattles. Instead of *breaking* the monuments of idolatry, our early teachers gave them a Christian baptism, by cutting on them the symbols of their own religion, and with the *rites* and *ceremonies* of paganism they dealt in like manner.

The places of Druidical worship, which Maelrubha found on his arrival in Applecross, in all probability became afterwards places of Christian worship;¹ and such of them as were believed to possess *special* virtues, continued to enjoy their special reputation, with this difference, however, that what the God, or Demon, or *Genius loci* did before, the Saint took upon himself, tolerating as much of the old *ceremony* as the elastic conscience of the age permitted. "Une religion chargée de beaucoup de pratiques," says Montesquieu, "attache plus à elle qu'une autre, qui l'est moins,"² and this principle was freely acted on—the more freely, perhaps, that the early Christian teachers came among a people peculiarly given to ceremony, if we may trust the remark of Pliny, "The Britons are so stupendly superstitious in their ceremonies that they go even beyond the Persians."³ I am inclined to think, with Pennant and the writer in the Old Statistical Account, that Inch Maree was such a locality. The sacrifice of the Bull, and the speaking of the Saint as "the God," make this probable, while the belief expressed by some old writers that such was the fact, and existing oral traditions, render it still more so.

I have no earlier allusion to the well on this island than 1656. It was then the resort of the lunatic, and, as I have said, it may possibly have been so from the date of Mourie's arrival, or even before that time. One shrine in Belgium is known to have had a special reputation of this kind for more than 1200 years. I refer to that of St Dymphna in Gheel. Our own St Fillans, too, has been resorted to for the "blessed purpose of conferring health on the distressed" since the year 700.⁴ Further back still, Orpheus, who is said to have written the hymn to Mercury,

¹ Many of the mosques of Algeria are now the Christian churches of the French occupants of the country.

² "De l'Esprit des Lois," l. xxv. ch. ii.

³ Burton's *Anat. of Melancholy*, ed. 1859, p. 667, quoted from Pliny, lib. iii.

⁴ John Laurie Buchanan's "Def. of Highlanders," pp. 168-224.

speaks of Mercury's *Grot*, where remedy was to be had for lunatics and lepers.¹

The most interesting feature of these extracts, however, is the finding so complete and formal a sacrificial ceremony *commonly* practised in our country at so late a period as within 200 years of our own day. The people point to Inverasdale as the last place where the sacrifice was offered. For the cure of the murrain in cattle, one of the herd is still sacrificed for the good of the whole. This is done by burying it alive. I am assured, that within the last ten years such a barbarism occurred in the county of Moray.² It is, however, happily, and beyond all doubt, very rare. The sacrifice of a cock, however, in the same fashion, for the cure of epilepsy, as I shall presently show, is still not unfrequently practised; but in neither of these cases is the sacrifice offered on the shrine of a saint, or to a named god, though, of course, in both there is the silent acknowledgment of some power thus to be propitiated.

I only know one other recorded instance of the formal sacrifice of a bull in Scotland to a saint on his feast-day.

"A writer of the twelfth century, Reginald of Durham, sometimes also called Reginald of Coldingham, takes occasion, in his lively 'Book of the Miracles of St Cuthbert,' to relate certain incidents which befel the famous St Aelred of Rievaulx in the year 1164, during a journey into Pictland,—that is Galloway it would seem, or perhaps, more generally, the provinces of Scotland, lying to the south of the Forth and Clyde. The Saintlie Abbot happened to be at 'Cuthbrihtis Kirche,' or Kircudbright, as it is now called, on the feast-day of its great patron. A bull the marvel of the parish for its strength and ferocity, was dragged to the church, bound with cords, to be offered as an alms and oblation to St Cuthbert."³

It is curious to find, in the inaccessible districts both of the north and

¹ Le Clerc, "Hist. of Med." 19.

² The "Elgin and Morayshire Courier" of 24th May 1861, in noticing the reading of this paper, has the following editorial remark—"The case referred to by Dr Mitchell took place not twenty miles from Elgin."

³ Joseph Robertson, Esq., on "Scholastic Offices in the Scottish Church in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries."—*Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, v. 56, 57. It is interesting to find that the clerks of the Church—the Scolofthes—who must have

south of Scotland, traces of a similar Christianised paganism.¹ Whether these ceremonies are remains of the vague Druidical, or of the Helio-arkite, or of the Mithraic worship, I am not able to say. As regards the last, which was set up in opposition to Christianity, and which used many of its ceremonies, it is known that the sacrifice of a bull was one of its rites.² The study of this form of worship has not yet received from Scottish antiquaries the attention which it probably deserves.

It would seem that to some saints the sacrifice of a bull was not confined to the day of honour, but was a thing of frequent occurrence. This appears from a letter³ on the superstitions of Caernarvonshire of the six-

been the best informed and most learned, opposed the ceremony, and attempted to throw it into ridicule, by proposing to bait the bull, probably an indication that opinion was then beginning to change.

¹ During the course of the paper allusion will be made to some Welsh superstitions of the same character.

² *Vide* paper by Meyrick, in the "Archæologia Cambrensis," vol. iii., and Well-beloved's "York."

In order to destroy the influence of the priests, the Romans at first endeavoured to suppress Druidism, and as they could not leave the people without a religion, they probably compelled them to adopt the rites and ceremonies of Romish paganism. When the power of the priests was effectually crippled, and no longer dreaded, the worship of the native divinities was tolerated, but not resumed in its purity. The altars of the second and third centuries prove a mixing of the two paganisms; and there is reason to believe that this modified worship was adopted both by the natives and their invaders.

After the battle of Anglesey, many of the Druids fled to Scotland, and had seminaries somewhere to the north of the Strath Clwyd Britons, which were finally suppressed at the close of the sixth century by Rhydderch, "the imbibor of learning," that is, of Christianity. This may be regarded as the final extinction of Druidism. But it would appear probable that, as Romish paganism, after a time, began to acknowledge and worship, covertly and openly, the divinities of the Druids, so Christianity did not escape a similar pollution, but after a time tolerated and even adopted not a few of the ceremonies and sacrifices of that modified Druidism with which it had to deal. And since Druidism existed in force to a later period in the North of Scotland than elsewhere, it may be reasonably expected that we shall there find the strongest and most enduring evidence of the infusion of paganism into Christianity.

³ A manuscript formerly in the library of John Anstis, Esq., Garter King of Arms, and printed in the *Collectanea* of Leland, and also in a paper on Welsh

teenth century, in which the writer tells us that he visited the locality where bullocks were said to be offered to St Beyno, and that he witnessed such an offering in 1589. This Beyno is described as "the saint of the parish of Clynnog, and the chiefest of all saints;" but we are told that the people did not dare to cut down the trees that grew on the saint's grounds, "lest Beyno should kill them, or do them some one harm or another." Though so saintly, therefore, as to be deemed the chiefest of all saints, he was evidently not worshipped solely as a beneficent being, and sacrifices were offered to avert his anger, as well as to secure his favour; thus bringing out his successorship as saint of the place to the demon loci of pure paganism. "They called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius;"¹ and *vice versâ*.

In our own day, belief in the healing virtues of the well on Inch Maree is general over all Ross-shire, but more especially over the western district. The lunatic is taken there without consideration of consent. As he nears the island, he is suddenly jerked out of the boat into the loch; a rope having been made fast to him, by this he is drawn into the boat again, to be a second, third, or fourth time unexpectedly thrown overboard during the boat's course round the island. He is then landed, made to drink of the waters, and an offering is attached to the tree. Sometimes a second and third circumnavigation of the island is thought necessary, with a repetition of the immersions, and of the visit to the well.

The writer of the "New Statistical Account" in 1845 says, that the poor victim of this superstitious cruelty was towed round the island after the boat by his tender-hearted friends. Macculloch, writing in 1824, says, "Here also there was a sacred well in which, as in St Fillans, lunatics were dipped, with the usual offerings of money; but the well remains and the practice has passed away." He makes two mistakes here. Lunatics are not and cannot be dipped into the well, which is not larger than a bucket, and both practice and well still exist. Pennant describes the ceremony in 1774, as having a greater show of religion in the rites, and less barbarity in the form of immersion. Ac-

Superstitions, by E. L. B. in the "Archæologia Cambrensis," vol. i. 3d series, pp. 235, 236.

¹ Acts xiv. 12.

cording to him, the patient was taken to the "Sacred Island, made to kneel before the altar, where his attendants left an offering in money—he was then brought to the well, sipped some of the holy water, and a second offering was made; that done, he was thrice dipped in the lake, and the same operation was repeated every day for some weeks."¹

I could not learn that any form of words is at present in use, nor do any of the writers referred to make mention of such a thing. Nor does it appear that the feast-day of the saint is now regarded as more favourable than any other.

There is an unwillingness to tell a stranger of the particular cases in which this superstitious practice had been tried, but several came to my knowledge. About seven years ago, a furious madman was brought to the island from a neighbouring parish. A rope was passed round his waist; and with a couple of men at one end in advance, and a couple at the other behind, like a furious bull to the slaughter-house, he was marched to the loch side, and placed in a boat, which was pulled once round the island, the patient being jerked into the water at intervals. He was then landed, drank of the water, attached his offering to the tree, and, as I was told, in a state of happy tranquillity went home. "In matters of superstition among the ignorant, one shadow of success prevails against a hundred manifest contradictions."²

The last case of which I heard came from a parish in the east of Ross, and was less happy in its issue. It was that of a young woman, who is now in one of our asylums. This happened about three years ago.

Another case was reported in the "Inverness Courier" of 4th November 1852, and is quoted at length by Dr Reeves in his paper on Saint Maelrubha, already referred to. (See *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. iii. p. 288.)³

"Every superstition," says Archbishop Whately, "in order to be rightly understood, should be read backward."⁴ In this manner I have

¹ Pennant, *op. cit.* 330.

² Le Clerc, *op. cit.* 43.

³ In reference to this notice I may mention that some fifteen or twenty years back, a farmer from Letter Ewe is said to have brought a mad dog to the well on the island. It drank of the waters and was cured; but the desecrating act is said to have driven virtue for a time from the well.

⁴ Whately's Annotations on Bacon's Essays, p. 163.

endeavoured to treat that which is attached to the little known Inch Maree. We have seen it as it exists to-day,—with its ceremonies of cruelty, barbarism, and ignorance; we have seen it, differing little from its present form, a century ago; we have seen it in 1656 and 1678 associated with an abominable and heathenish sacrifice; we have connected it with the saintly founder of the monastery of Applecross; and we have adduced some reasons for believing that its real paternity goes back to strictly pagan times.

It is difficult to uproot superstitions of this nature. They may have to accommodate themselves to changes, but they will still live, though they may have lost limbs, or put on masks, or changed their name, or even been deserted by their priestly patrons. Their death is always slow. Rather than be *put out*, they consent to many contortions and losses. To Romanism they only yield that which is imperatively demanded, and here they generally make a fair bargain. To a sterner and less formal Protestantism they make larger concessions, but always yielding bit by bit resistingly. Macadam and Watt are deadly foes. Turnpikes and railways they shun. The schoolmaster is a sure destroyer; and against his blows they have no shield to raise. “The master of superstition,” says Bacon, “is the people;”¹ and we add, the master of the people is ignorance.

In such old superstitions we often find monuments more enduring than stone. A *Goth* of a *Celt*, as lately happened, breaks up an ancient cross for the lintel of a manse, or for some other equally profane purpose; and what time had spared for so many centuries we have the end of in a moment—a complete destruction, from which there is no return. No such complete and sudden death can befall old customs and superstitions. They are tenacious of life, and, in *their* bills of mortality there is no such heading as *violent deaths*. One religion condemns them, yet with some change of garment deems it prudent to adopt them; another wages open war against them, and appoints an army of faithful searchers and tryers to hunt them to death; but they retire into corners, where their own army of faithful adherents secretly cherishes and keeps them in life. In the obscurity of such retreats we still occasionally fall

¹ Essay on Superstition. Bacon.

upon these monumental customs, but with those markings which would reveal their origin, effaced or fragmentary, and not easily deciphered or understood. Yet there are traces of the markings still there, and the reading of them becomes a problem of much interest, but one which demands a learning and research possessed only by the few, and the want of which I plead as an apology for the small success of the effort in this case. "We were *hinted* by the occasion, not *sought* the opportunity, to write of old things, or intrude upon the antiquary."¹ Old customs, as well as old urns, are to be found lying in silence, or buried among us, or in short accounts passed over; and it appears to be the duty of one whose *social excavations* occasionally bring them to light, not to *repose* them in their obscurity.

Marx, in his quaint letter to the defunct Albert Thaer, predicts that "a time will come when the amateurs in nosology, like the friends of humanity for the primitive races of mankind, will unite in an aborigines protection society for the conservation of the remnant of human diseases."² Superstition may be regarded as a disease; but the only conservation which we desire for it is one in its history on paper. If, however, as is said, it be so firmly imbedded in human nature, that a phrenologist might discover an organ for it,—a spot in the brain which can discern no truth, as the yellow speck in the eye receives no image,³ —we shall have to wait long before any union is needed, even to keep the *remnant* alive.

Melista.

There is a little island called Melista, separated by a narrow sea-way from the coast of Uig, without any permanent population, but to which, in former times, people resorted for the two or three summer months, to look after the cows, which they transported to it for the sake of pasturage. Tradition says of this island, that no one was ever born on it who was not from birth insane, or who did not become so before death. In the last generation, three persons had the misfortune, for the first time, to see the light of day on this unlucky spot, and all three were

¹ Sir Thomas Browne, iii. 4. Bohn's ed.

² Moral Asp. of Med. Life, by Mackness, p. 115.

³ Marx's Letter to Petrus de Apono.

mad.¹ Of one of them, who is remembered by the name of "Wild Murdoch," many strange stories are told. It is said that his friends used to tie a rope round his body, make it fast to the stern of the boat, and then pull out to sea, taking the wretched man in tow. The story goes, that he was so bouyant that he could not sink; that they "tried to press him down into the water;" that he could swim with a stone fastened to him; that when carried to the rocky holms of Melista or Greinan, round which the open Atlantic surges, and left there alone, he took to the water, and swam ashore; and that, when bound hand and foot, and left in a kiln, by a miracle of strength he broke his bonds and escaped. It was thus they are said to have treated him during his fits of maniacal excitement; and there are many still alive who saw it all, and gave a helping hand. Not single was this poor man's misfortune. To his insanity was added the calamity of living among an unenlightened people, a thousand years removed from the kindly doctrines of the good Pinel. The further story of wild Murdoch will astonish no one. He murdered his sister, was taken south, and died in an asylum; or, as the people say and believe, in the cell of a gloomy prison, under which the sea-wave came and went for ever.

I am not here detailing what happened in the middle ages. It is of the nineteenth century—of what living men saw—that I write.

The towing behind the boat² establishes a relation between the superstitions of Melista and Inch Maree. The additional belief, in the case of Melista, that an insane man cannot be made to sink, I find is common over the North-west Highlands. A gentleman in Dingwall first told me that it was a general opinion that idiots and insane persons do not sink in water. It is popularly accounted for, he stated, by the rupture of the gall-bladder, which is regarded as the condition of that organ in all such people. When I heard this, I remembered with interest that the learned author of the "*Pseudodoxia Epidemica*" tells

¹ This was asserted to me over and over again, but I think it improbable that this small island was the birthplace of all the three.

² A Lewis gentleman, who read this paper in manuscript, here inserts the following marginal note:—"The reason for *towing* wild Murdoch was, because it would not have been safe to have had him in the boat. This was told to me by one of his relatives."

us, that the popular explanation in his day of the floating of dead bodies was the bursting of the gall-bladder, which, as he says, being "the fiery humour, will readiest surmount the water."¹ The practice of immersion, and even submersion in the sea, or in other waters, for the cure of lunacy, is also of great antiquity, and has received the sanction of no less distinguished a physician than Boerhaave, one of whose celebrated aphorisms is to this effect: "*Præcipitatio in mare, submersio in eo continuata quam-diu ferre potest, princeps remedium est.*"² Borlase, in his "*Natural History of Cornwall*," quoting from Carew, says that, in the parish of Altarnum, madness was cured by placing the patient on the brink of a pool filled with the water from St Nun's Well, and then, without telling him of the intention, tumbling him into the pool, "where he was tossed up and down by some persons of superior strength, till, being quite debilitated, his fury forsook him. He was then carried to church, and masses were sung over him."³ To preclude the demon from lurking in the hair, a special water was sometimes used; the patient was plunged over head and ears in a bath of Gregorian water, and detained there *just up to the drowning point*. Many writers refer to this. We thus see that the custom is both old and wide-spread. It is not probable, however, that all its ramifications have had the same origin.

The belief that all born on Melista are or will be insane, has probably originated in two or three successive births on the island being thus unfortunate. I know a small parish in Scotland in which three idiots were born on the same night, and insanity appeared in the families of the last three consecutive occupants of a house which I know well—the families not being related to each other.

*Temple of St Molonah.*⁴

Near the Butt of the Lewis there is a small unpretending ruin, whose architecture shows it to be of considerable antiquity. It is called by the people the Teampull-mor, and also the Temple of St Molonah or

¹ Sir Thomas Browne, *op. cit.*, i. 404. Bohn's ed.

² Pettigrew's *Med. Superstitions*, p. 63.

³ Dalzell, *Darker Superstitions of Scotland*, p. 608, from "*Discours admirable d'une religieuse possédée*," p. 38.

⁴ In Gaelic, *Maolonfhadh*.

St Mulvay.¹ Lunatics are brought from many parts of the north-west of Scotland to this ruin.² By this, however, I do not mean that it is a yearly occurrence, or that it is a frequency in any way to be compared with that which once held good at St Fillan's, when, as has been affirmed, two hundred insane persons were carried thither annually.³ The patient walks seven times round the temple, is sprinkled with water from St Ronan's Well, which is close at hand, is then bound and deposited for the night on the site of the altar. If he sleeps, it is believed that a cure will follow, if not, the powers are unpropitious, and his friends take him home, believing it to be the will of Heaven that he shall remain as he is. The water was formerly brought from the well in an old stone cup, which was left in the keeping of a family, regarded as the descendants of the *clerk of the temple*.

One man who had been taken there, and whom I saw, had the good fortune to sleep, and was cured. He afterwards married, and had a family. Seven years ago he again became insane, and I found him labouring under dementia. I heard of several others in our own day, who had been sent to St Molonah—some from the mainland of Scotland, —but no happy issue was reported.

This superstition closely resembles that which is attached to the Chapel of St Fillan. As it is my object, however, in this paper to confine myself as much as possible to the superstitions of the North-west Highlands of Scotland, I shall do nothing more than allude to the miracle-working pool, to which the pen of Sir Walter Scott has given a world-wide fame. Would that his words embodied a truth, and not an idle superstition!

. " Saint Fillan's blessed *Well*,
Whose springs can frenzied dreams dispel,
And the crazed brain restore."⁴

¹ St Molochus.

² A Lewis gentleman, reading this paper in manuscript, writes on the margin, "I know two persons who were brought to the temple. The result was favourable, but one has had a return of the malady. It is said that a visit to the church has no efficacy for a *return* of the disease."

³ Heron's *Journey*, i. p. 282.

⁴ *Marmion*. Edition 1852, p. 124, and note 18. It is not in reality a *well*, but a deep rock *pool* in the river, which is close to the ruin.

Alexander Dewar, the present custodier of the Quigrich or Crozier of St Fillan, thus describes the ceremony :—"There is likewise in Strathfillan still standing the walls of an old chapel, where people used to go with those who were out of their mind; and after dipping them two or three times in a deep pool of water, they would leave them tied for the night in the old chapel, and such as got loose through the night they believed would get better, but those that remained bound were concluded incurable."¹ The two great days for visiting this spot were the 1st of May and 1st of August,² though the saint's feast-day is the 9th of January.³ The first of these is the favourite day for a vast number of the virtue wells of Scotland, and beyond doubt is connected with the pagan Beltane. Sometimes the *first day* has been changed to the *first Sunday*. Convenience may probably explain this change.

May Wells.

Of the many May wells which I know in Scotland, none appears to be in such repute as that of Craiguck, in the parish of Avoch, Ross-shire. Votive offerings are generally left at these wells, often simply consisting of bits of the patient's clothing, attached to a bush near the spring. It was not without astonishment that in so protestant a part of protestant Scotland as the parish of Avoch I found the bush above Craiguck Well, when I visited it last summer, literally covered with such offerings. Legion was their name. I might almost say with an old writer, quoted by Grose, that I saw on it such numbers of rags "as might have made a fayre rheme in a paper myll."⁴ These offerings, I doubt not, were at one time of a nature more valuable than the rag which is now deemed sufficient. They were left to propitiate or obtain the favour of the saint, and, before the epoch of saints, perhaps to appease a malevolent deity. In our day, I believe there is no definite recognition of the object; but, at the same time, I am satisfied that there is always a vague feeling that some supernatural power will thereby be made friendly, and give aid or intercession. No one will of course

¹ The Quigrich or Crozier of St Fillan. By Daniel Wilson, LL.D. 1859, p. 3.

² Dalryell, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

³ Sir Walter Scott. Note 3 to Glenfinlas.

⁴ Pettigrew, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

acknowledge this. Few, indeed, will admit that they are among the frequenters. Such wells are chiefly in renown for the restoration of "backgane bairns;" and it not unfrequently happens that children, regarded simply as backward in infancy, in later childhood, or in adult life, are acknowledged imbeciles or idiots, and thus come under my notice, and I have often found that the efficacy of these springs had in early life been tested, in the cases of such unfortunates, by a May-day visit, and an additional streamer to the bush.

In old times it was the custom, if a cure did not follow a visit to one well, for the patient to go on to another,—from Struthill say to St Fillan, and thence to Loch Maree or St Ronah; and if all the wells in Scotland failed, those in England were then resorted to. Such a case is given in the life of St Godric. A woman in Musselburgh became insane after childbirth, and murdered her child. After a time the mania became remitting, and "tunc cepit loca sancta per Scotiam circuire, cupiens plenam recipere sospitatem. Tandem venit ad sanctum Godricum," where her piety and importunity were rewarded by a miraculous cure.¹

In the first volume of the "Archæologia Cambrensis," there is a paper on "Holy Wells," by "Ab Ithel," who is of opinion that they were at one time objects of pagan worship; and in support of this he gives two important quotations, which I subjoin.²

It appears that St Patrick found such a worship among the Irish. His motive for visiting Slane is said to have been to see a fountain there, of which he had heard, and which the magi honoured, and made offerings to, as to a god.³

But not only do we find that in very remote and pagan as in later times, belief in the supernatural powers of such wells, or worship of them, was common, we also find that the ceremonies or rites still or lately attending

¹ De Vita Sancti Godrici, p. 391. Surtees Society's publications. Professor Simpson mentions this case in a late number of the "Med. Times and Gazette."

² "Neque nominatim inclamitans montes ipsos, aut fontes vel colles, aut fluvios olim exitiabiles, nunc vero humanis usibus utiles, quibus divinus honor a cæco tunc populo cumulabatur."—*Hist. Gild.* § 4.

"Prohibemus etiam serio—quod quis adoret Ignem, vel Fluvium Torrens, vel Saxa, vel alicujus generis arborum ligna."—*Wilkins, Leg. Ang. Sax.* p. 134.

³ Sir W. Betham's Irish Antiquarian Researches. Ap. 29.

a visit to them are substantially the same as those anciently observed. It was the general custom in Scotland, not long ago, to drop into the waters a pin, or small coin, or pebble with the name of the patient on it, as well as to attach a bit of the clothing to a bush. The same, and other similar offerings (even to the pin), are or were lately dropt into or left at the holy fountains of Wales. And I find that to the springs of the Nile similar gifts were made. Seneca, in *Quest. Nat.*, when speaking of them, says: "In hac ora stipes sacerdotes, et aurea dona præfecti cum solemne venit sacrum jaciunt."—"Here, on solemn festivals, the priests throw in their brass money, and the great men their gold offerings." And Pliny (lib. viii. ep. 8), speaking of the sacred spring of the Clitumnus, has an allusion to the same custom, "Fons purus et vitreus ut numerare jactas stipes et relucentes calculos possis."—"A spring so pure and clear, that you may count the pieces of money that have been thrown into it, and the shining pebbles at the bottom."¹

That the superstitious belief in the virtues of these holy wells is a prolongation of pagan worship, we have a further proof in the choice of the day for visiting them. To this I have already alluded. There are, moreover, cases in which the well is associated with a sort of sacrificial ceremony. Such is St Tegla's Well, in the parish of Llandegla, which was considered efficacious in cases of epilepsy. The patient repaired to it after sunset, washed in it, made an offering *into* it of fourpence, walked round it three times repeating the Lord's Prayer; then offered a cock or hen, carrying it round the well and church; after which he went into the church, crept under the altar, and passed the night with the Bible as a pillow, and the communion-cloth as a coverlet—departing at break of day, after a further offering of money, and leaving the cock or hen.²

This superstition can be regarded as nothing but an amalgam of Christianity and paganism. I agree with Ab Ithel in thinking it probable that the early missionaries to Britain appropriated for the church these wells, by selecting them as the "Lavers of regeneration," or baptismal founts. In the very parish of which Ab Ithel is incumbent, there is such

¹ I am indebted for these two last quotations to a paper by "W." on the Holy Wells in Monmouthshire, printed in the "*Archæologia Cambrensis*," vol. ii. p. 87.

² *Arch. Camb.* vol. i. p. 50.

a well, from which, though a mile or more from the church, several of his parishioners, living in 1846, remembered the baptismal water invariably to have been brought.¹

Nay, I have proof, that the enlightened, 250 years ago, regarded the resorting to these wells as a sort of devil worship in disguise. In a little quarto tract by Dr Anderson (the inventor of the pills which still go by his name), entitled "The Colde Springe of Kinghorne Craig. His admirable and New Tryed Properties, so far foorth as yet are found by Experience. Written by Patrick Anderson, D. of Physicke, Edinburgh, 1618.," he assures his readers that the waters of his Kinghorne well "are not lyk the superstitious or mud-earth wells of Menteith, or Lady Well of Strath-Erne, and our Lady Well of Ruthven, with a number of others in this countrie, all tapestried about with old rags, as certaine signes and sacraments wherewith they arle the divell with ane arls-pennie of their health; so suttle is that false knave, making them believe that it is only the virtue of the water, and no thing els. Such people cannot say with David, *The Lord is my helper*, but the Devill."²

Pennant, in his Tour (ii. 336) gives an account of the well of St George, in the parish of Cegidoz. near Abergelen.³ He says, "St George had in the parish his Holy well, at which the British Mars had his offering of horses." Now the British Mars was the god Beli, who was worshipped as "the leader in battle."

Superstitions relating to Epilepsy.

Some disgusting superstitions, associated with epilepsy, still exist in Scotland:—

In the parish of Barvas, an epileptic maniac was put into bed with his dead mother, and left there for the night. A cure did not follow, and he ultimately died in a fit. I met many persons who had known this unfortunate lad.

In the parish of Kintail, where the people are very backward and

¹ Arch. Camb. vol. i. p. 54.

² I am indebted for this quotation to Mr Joseph Robertson. The early notice of the bits of clothing as an offering is of interest.

³ Arch. Camb. i. 184.

credulous, I encountered the same superstition in a still more offensive form. I saw a poor epileptic idiot there who had been made to drink the water in which his dead sister had been washed. The fits are said to have been less severe and less frequent ever since. I was also told of another epileptic in one of the western islands, who had been bathed in the water in which his dead wife had been washed.

In the west of Ross and in the Hebrides, I have seen several epileptic idiots who had been made to drink a small quantity of their own blood for the cure of the disease.

In Caithness, the skull of a suicide was used as a drinking cup in order to cure epilepsy. Mr B., a schoolmaster in Orkney, states that he knew the remedy to have been tried in the case of J. R., an epileptic, now dead. The body of C. B. was disinterred in order to obtain her skull for this purpose. She committed suicide by leaping from Duncansbay Head, and, falling on the rock below, her body was recovered and buried.

The fresh blood of a criminal was long a much esteemed remedy. Barrington, in his "Observations on the More Ancient Statutes," quotes the following:—"A notion still (1769) prevails in Austria, that when a criminal is beheaded, the blood drank immediately that it springs from the neck is a certain cure for the falling sickness."¹ It is singular, indeed, how mystic has ever been the value attached to the blood and corpses of criminals. We encounter it in many superstitions. Crollius, in his receipt for the weapon-salve, makes choice of moss that grows on the skull of a man that hath died a violent death; but his commentator, Hartman, expressly "preferres one that hath been hanged."² In an old Dispensatory published in 1670, I find the following:—"Some say human blood drunk hot cures epilepsy, if violent exercise be used after it; but it is very dangerous, for oftentimes it causes epilepsy, and brings great tremblings on those that take it."³

For the cure of the same disease, there is still practised in the North of Scotland a formal sacrifice—not an oblique, but a literal and downright sacrifice to a nameless but secretly acknowledged power, whose propitiation is desired.

¹ Timbs' Pop. Errors, p. 189.

² Wittie's Translation of Primrose, p. 402.

³ Salmon's Dispensatory, II., i. 16.

On the spot where the epileptic first falls a black cock is buried alive, along with a lock of the patient's hair and some parings of his nails. I have seen at least three epileptic idiots for whom this is said to have been done. A woman who assisted at such a sacrifice minutely described to me the order of procedure. In this instance, in addition to what I have named, three coins were also buried, and a "*curn*" of red onions, pounded small, were applied to the patient's navel.

Dr G——, of N——, informs me that some time ago he was called on to visit a poor man belonging to the fishing population, who had suddenly died, and who had been subject to epileptic seizures. His friends told the doctor that at least they had the comfort of knowing that everything had been done for him which could have been done. On asking what remedies they had tried, he was told that among other things a cock had been buried alive below his bed, and the spot was pointed out. But few years have elapsed since this sacrifice was openly offered to the unknown demon of epilepsy in an improving town, to which the railway now conveys the traveller, and which has six churches and ten schools for a population of about 4000. Its occurrence so recently in a community so advanced and so privileged, is certainly a marvel deserving of record. An old fisherman was asked by the Doctor if he knew of other cases in which this heathen ceremony had been performed, and he at once pointed out two spots on the public road or street where epileptics had fallen, and where living cocks had been cruelly buried, to appease the power which had struck them down.

I have always found that the people who had performed this ceremony hesitated to speak of it with freedom. There is evidently a secret, slavish dread of a power which they deem it prudent not to offend, by speaking contemptuously of it; yet when charged with acknowledging it, a denial is always given—not full and broad, but cautiously and evasively worded. The same thing may be said in reference to all superstitions among the Highlanders.

This sacrifice of a cock for epilepsy and insanity is of great antiquity.

In 1597, at the trial of Christian Lewingstoun, the "earding of a quik cok in the grund," is spoken of as a remedy for insanity.¹ The Moors

¹ Dalryell, *op. cit.* p. 190.

and negroes of Algeria drown a living cock in a sacred well for the cure of epilepsy and madness; and another Arab cure for epilepsy, with loss of memory, is the drinking of the bile of a cock every morning.¹ Hens were offered to St Vitus for the cure of chorea, or the dance of St Vitus, a disease related to epilepsy.

“The next is Vitus sodde in Oyle, before whose ymage faire,
Both men and women bringing hennes for offering do repaire,
The cause whereof I do not know, I think for some disease,
Which he is thought to drive away from such as do him please.”²

The cock was consecrated to Apollo, the god of medicine, and in Egypt a cock was sacrificed to Osiris, whom some identify with the Apollo of the Greeks.³ During the prevalence of infectious diseases in the East, the cock forms an oblation to a sanguinary divinity; it is sacrificed at the entrance of the temples dedicated to one corresponding to the Hecate of the Greeks; or it is killed over the bed of the invalid.⁴ The women of Malabar offer the same oblation for the cure of disease.⁵ Sick persons in Ceylon frequently dedicate a red cock to a malignant divinity; and if they recover, it is sacrificed.⁶ The Collyrium which restored sight to Valerius Aper, was the blood of a white cock mixed with honey, and Esculapius himself prescribed it.⁷ Cocks and hens were offered in Wales to St Tegla for the cure of epilepsy.⁸

It is interesting to find what we must regard as modifications of the same superstition, so widely spread. The inference is that they have probably had a common origin, and one of great antiquity. The cock appears to have been sacred to pagan divinities of all ages; and early Christians, preaching a religion the spiritual nature of which made it unpalatable and incomprehensible to a rude and ignorant people, seem to

¹ Bertherand, *Med. des Arabes*, p. 465.

² Googe's *Trans. of Naageorgus*. Brand., *op. cit.* vi. p. 298.

³ Dalyell, *op. cit.* p. 191.

⁴ Barthelemy's *Voyage aux Indes Orientales*, vol. i. pp. 418–20; and Dalyell, *op. cit.* p. 419.

⁵ Moor's *Hindu Pantheon*, pp. 149, 150, from Dalyell, p. 419.

⁶ Knox's *Relation of Ceylon*, p. 78, from Dalyell, p. 420.

⁷ Le Clerc's *Hist. of Physick*, 1699, p. 85.

⁸ *Arch. Camb.*, vol. i. p. 50.

have tolerated some of the superstitions or ceremonies of the religion which they struggled to supplant, and more especially those which had to do with the bodily rather than with the spiritual part of man.

It is more true of epilepsy and epileptic mania, than of any other form of nervous or mental disease, that in old times it was regarded as a demoniacal possession. In the miracles of St Godric,¹ there are fifteen or sixteen referring to the insane. All of these, and more particularly the epileptics, are described as possessed of devils. One under the heading "De Dæmoniaca ibi liberata," refers to a woman who is said to have been "Sedecim annis a dæmonibus, quos *Eumenides*² vocant ita seducta et pergravata," &c. Another is, "De Dæmoniosa;" and another, "De insana et dæmoniosa." While the cure of a furious maniac is thus announced, "A vesania simul et dæmonio liberatus, sanus surrexit." Those who have witnessed a severe epileptic seizure, with its appalling convulsive strugglings, will have little difficulty in understanding how a primitive and ignorant people should regard it as having a supernatural cause.

When, or why it came to be the *morbus sacer* of the Greeks and Romans, I am unable to say. Hippocrates ridicules the idea of there being anything divine about it,³ and there are many reasons for believing that *it* was treated as sacred, only in the sense of being a peculiar or special infliction from the gods. I am equally unable to say how it came to be designated the *morbus santicus*, an epithet in which the idea of guilt appears to be involved. It has also been called the Herculean distemper, "not," says Le Clerc, "that *he* was ever troubled with it, or knew how to cure it, but because a power equal to that of Hercules is required to subdue so difficult a malady."⁴ We are told, however, that Hercules was twice insane, and it is possible that he may have laboured under convulsive seizures. He was, moreover, the patron god of epileptics.

Whatever was the understanding of the Greeks and Romans, it is certain that by the Jews epilepsy was looked on as diabolical.⁵ This indeed was the case with Orientals generally. Among the Arabs, to this

¹ De Vita Sancti Godrici.

² The use of this word is interesting.

³ Works of Hippocrates, trans. by Adams.

⁴ Le Clerc, *op. cit.* p. 33.

⁵ Dalzell, *op. cit.* 615.

day, epilepsy, and all convulsive affections, are regarded as a horrible sexual union of the *djenounes* (or bad spirits) with the patients¹ In our own country it is well known that, till a period not very remote, the notion of an epileptic being possessed of a devil was not uncommon. "The sorcerie, incantations, and devillische charmeing," by which they were cured in the seventeenth century, clearly point to such a belief. Every year, however, it is losing its hold, and it is only to be traced now in remote and little frequented regions.

Many of the *signs* of possession point particularly to the epileptic. Thus, the entrance of a demon was sometimes denoted by a sensation of cold water running down the back;² farther, the demons were felt "creeping like ants between the flesh and the skin, or as the pricking of needles."³ These are neither more nor less than the *aura* and *formication*, the well-known premonitories of an epileptic fit. Again, personal suffering, distortion of the visage, and barbarous screams, were signs, if not essentials of possession, as they are also of epilepsy.

In the details of the sacrifice which has led to these comments there are several indications that it was devised for the expulsion of a *dæmon*. The mind at first refuses to leave the major fact,—the actual sacrifice of an animal by the Protestants of Scotland in the nineteenth century. The secondaries, however, are of interest. The hair and nails, which were buried with the cock, are often oddly introduced into the history of possession. It was always recognised that these evil spirits "can lurk among the hair, or conceal themselves under a nail."⁴ The exorcist, when he failed in complete dispossession, sometimes actually caused the *dæmon* to recede from the head and heart, and fixed him in the toes,⁵ and there was a desperate but special remedy,—viz., the Gregorian bath, to which allusion has been made, for expelling the *dæmon* from his final retreat in the hair.

While St Ruffin and St Romanus were invoked against madness, St John and St Valentine succeeded Hercules in being the special patrons

¹ Bertherand, *Med. des Arabes*, pp. 54, 57.

³ Dalyell, *op. cit.* p. 604.

⁵ *Ibid.*, *op. cit.* p. 609.

² Dalyell, *op. cit.* p. 604.

⁴ *Ibid.*, *op. cit.* p. 604.

of epileptics;¹ and these saints not only removed, but sent the diseases with which they were associated.

“Saint Valentine beside to such as doe his power despise,
The falling sickness sendes, and helps the man that to him cries;
The raging mind of furious folkes doth Vitus pacifie,
And doth restore them to their witte, being called on speedilie.”²

In Britain, St John appears to have been generally recognised as the patron of epileptics, and accordingly we find numerous superstitions in which he is involved.

“Three nails made in the vigil of the nativity of St John Baptist, called Midsummer Eve, and driven in so deep that they cannot be seen, in the place where the party doth fall that hath the falling sickness, and naming the said party’s name while it is doing, doth drive away the disease quite.”³ “Some, by a superstition of the Gentiles, fall down before his image (St John Baptist’s), and hope thus to be freed from the epileps; and they are farther persuaded, that if they can but gently go into the saint’s shrine, and not cry out disorderly, or hollow like madmen, when they go there, they shall be a whole year free from this disease; but if they attempt to bite with their teeth the saint’s head they go to kisse, and to revile him, then they shall be troubled with this disease every month, which commonly comes with the course of the moon; yet extreme juglings and frauds are wont to be concealed under this matter.”⁴

Cures for epilepsy, of a still more meaningless character, were common, especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

¹ Brand, *op. cit.* i. p. 357. “Ruffinus et Romanus phrenesi præsent. Morbo sentico, olim Hercules, nunc Joannes et Valentinus præsent.”—(Moresini Papatus, p. 16; from Brand, *op. cit.*) The different forms of madness, indeed, had each its saintly physician. “St Maturin was physitian for fools, having relation to the word Matto. St Acaire cureth the acariastres, *i.e.*, frantic or furious bedlams. St Avertin cureth the avertineux, *i.e.*, fantastical lunatic persons, and all the diseases of the head.”—(World of Wonders, p. 308; from Brand, *op. cit.* i. p. 362.)

² Googe’s translation of Naogeorgus, pp. 98, 99; Brand, *op. cit.* i. 363.

³ Lupton’s Book of Notable Things, ed. 1660, p. 40; Brand, *op. cit.* i. p. 336.

⁴ Levinus Lemnius, 1658, Eng. trans., p. 28; Brand, *op. cit.* i. 305–6.

Paracelsus recommended an amulet of coral against epilepsy, and it was thus used in England. It was also given internally, when it was thought advantageous to take it in May-dew, and the great exponent of vulgar errors does not altogether deny its efficacy.¹

The root of the peony was often suspended round the necks of children as a charm against epilepsy. It was called Baaras;² and Solomon himself is said to have pointed out its value, which rested on its being a noted expulsor.³

The foot of the elk is a widely known remedy. It was considered infallible, and was believed in by the Indians, and by the Norwegians and other northern nations;⁴ while in Britain, it was at one time regarded as a "specific against epilepsy."⁵

Rings of various kinds were believed in and worn. Those, for instance, made of a piece of silver, collected at the communion, cured fits of all kinds;⁶ and there was a gain of power if the silver were collected on Easter Sunday.

Almost all the precious stones, worn as amulets, were in repute as "noble antepilepticks," as was also the loadstone, fed with filings of steel, and wrapped up in a purple cloth, and hung about the neck.

A drop or two of the blood of the navel string, being first given to a new-born child in a little breast-milk, was believed to prevent the falling sickness; and Lupton says that a piece of a child's navel string borne in a ring is good against it.

The "aqua et oleum sterco humani" are called "very effectual," and there were other remedies even more filthy than this. Brendelius says of the "essentia cranii humani," that it "is prevalent against epilepsy beyond all other things whatsoever."

The urine of the bear drunk in mulled vinegar, the blood of a boar cat taken with wine, the testicles of the otter,⁷ powdered hare's heart in

¹ Sir Thomas Browne, *op. cit.* i. p. 190.

² Le Clerc, *op. cit.* p. 45.

³ Tuke and Bucknill, *Psych. Med.* p. 12. Quotation from Josephus.

⁴ Pettigrew, *op. cit.* p. 66.

⁵ New Lond. Disp., 1676-7. From this work much of the following information is derived.

⁶ Pettigrew, *op. cit.* p. 61.

⁷ I recently saw an epileptic, residing in Upper Strathdon, to whom the liver of the otter had been given.

Rhenish wine, and the gall of the sheep with honey, were some of the disgusting remedies for this disease common two hundred years ago.

Ivory was in high repute, and hence perhaps the virtues of Barbeck's bone, which is now in the museum of the Scottish Antiquaries. Its history is thus given:—

“A curious relic, consisting of a tablet of ivory, was long preserved in this family (Campbell of Barbeck). It was called Barbeck's bone, and was esteemed a sovereign cure for madness. When borrowed, a deposit of L.100 was exacted in order to ensure its safe return.”¹

We cannot read of such gross superstition and ignorance without thankfulness that they belong to past times. It must be remembered, however, that in out-of-the-way corners of our land there still exists a faith in practices and remedies as barbarous and coarse as the worst of the obsolete superstitions to which I have alluded. I have found nothing more heathenish than the sacrifice of the cock, and nothing coarser than the drinking of the water in which a dead sister has been washed, or the using of the suicide's skull as a drinking cup. Fortunately such things are nowhere common, but everywhere the reverse, and in nine-tenths of the country they are probably wholly unknown.

The superstitions of an excessive credulity appear to have been characteristic of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. If we go back to more remote periods, we find a deliberate cruelty in the treatment of the poor epileptic which appals our age, marked as it is by a tender regard for all who are crippled in purse, body, or mind. One reads the following quotation from Boece's chapter on the manners of the ancient Scots with a doubting inquiry as to its truth:—

“He that was trublit with the falling evil, or fallin daft or wod, or havand sic infirmite as succedis be heritage fra the fader to the son, was geldit, that his infectit blude suld spread na firthur. The women that was fallin lipper, or had any other infection of blude, was banist fra the company of men, and, gif she consavit barne under sic infirmite, baith she and her barne war buryit quik.”²

¹ Stat. Account, Craignish parish.

² Boece, Translation by Bellenden, ed. 1821, p. 58.

“And this was done for the common good, lest the whole nation should be injured or corrupted. A severe doom, you will say, and not to be used among Christians, yet more to be looked into than it is.” Such is Burton’s comment on this passage from Boece.¹

The notion that *Idiots* are favourites of God, persons whom the Almighty has taken under his peculiar protection, is said to exist still among some Eastern nations. Of its existence in this country, in our own or in other times, I have found little or no evidence. There has, however, long been, and in some parts of Scotland there still is, a feeling that these unfortunates illustrate a *special providence*—an extraordinary act of divine power—but in the sense of a special affliction, perhaps even of an abandonment to malignant spirits. The tender regard with which many helpless idiots are cared for by their mothers, is simply the fruit of *maternal affection*, which sees in the idiot, though an adult, the dependence of the infant, and gives the same care and nursing in answer. Neglect, however, is too frequently encountered. The worst and coldest bed in the house is too often that in which the idiot sleeps. But it is pleasant to know that a kindness founded on a knowledge of the real nature of the calamity is becoming more general, and sentiments like the following less rare:—

“An’ is there ane amang ye, but your best wi’ him wad share?
Ye mauna scaith the feckless, they’re God’s peculiar care.”

(BALLANTYNE.)

SUICIDES.

In Lewis, till recently, burial in a churchyard was refused to the suicide.² Not long ago a clergyman there destroyed himself in a fit of insanity, and it was with difficulty that his friends found a resting-place for his body in the graveyard of the church in which he had been accustomed to preach.

A grave in the Lewis usually lies east and west, with the head to the

Burton’s *Anat. of Mel.*, p. 140.

² A Lewis gentleman, who read this paper in manuscript, inserts the following marginal note against this:—“Quite true, and the feeling *still* exists in the minds of most of the Lewis people.”

west, and the body is carried to it feet first. The poor suicide, however, is carried head foremost, and his head lies to the east. A spot, too, is sometimes chosen for his grave on which the sun cannot shine.

The custom on the west and east coast of Ross-shire differed somewhat. There the body was usually buried at low-water mark. In 1822, a poor old woman near D——, in a fit of melancholia, cut her throat. She was buried at low-water mark, but the sea disturbed her grave, and her body floated and was washed ashore. It was found there, and not being at first recognised, the people proceeded to carry it to a neighbouring house. When on their way, the gash in the throat was observed, the body recognised, and instantly dropped. For two days it lay at the roadside on the snow, till a person of influence in the neighbourhood had it buried a second time, and more securely, in the same fashion as at first. My informant was an eye-witness.

Not far from the same place, and about the same time, a gentleman committed suicide. His friends concealed the cause of his death, and he was buried in the churchyard. The truth came out, however, and the people took up his body by night, and buried it on the shore.

Within the memory of those living, a suicide was thus buried on the shores of Loch Dhuig. For two years after few herrings came to the loch. The people attributed this to the suicide's grave; and, accordingly, they raised the body and took it to the top of a mountain which separates Inverness-shire from Ross-shire. The story says that thereon the herrings returned.

This habit of burying suicides on the march between two counties was common in the south. On a hill between Lanark and Dumfries there are the graves of many suicides. The body was carried there in a cart, which was left on the spot, as an unholy thing to be eaten by the weather. The last burial is said to have occurred fifty or sixty years ago, and report says that a fearful scene of drunkenness took place on the occasion,—the coffin being torn open, and the body baptised in whisky. There are those living who remember to have seen fragments of the cart by this man's grave.

Not more than seven years ago, a poor man is said to have drowned himself in Lochcarron, and his body came ashore near Strome Ferry. The herrings deserted the loch about that time, and the people con-

nected this with the act of self-destruction in its waters. To overcome this injurious influence, about three years ago, I am told that they gathered on the spot where the body was found, and lighted a large (purifying) fire over it. Within the last thirty years a similar thing is said to have been done in Lochalsh. My informant remembers to have seen the poor suicide in life.

The grandfather of a lunatic, who was last year sent to an asylum, drowned himself off the sand of Laide. He was washed ashore at Coigeach, and his body found there; and I was informed that the people of the adjoining township took it to sea again and set it adrift. It was again carried ashore, but on this occasion at the place where he had committed the act. From this it was carried to the top of Aird Dhubb, a hill not visible from the sea, where it was buried. The ropes by which the rude coffin was carried are said recently to have come to sight. My informant remembered the occurrence well.

SEVENTH SON.

That the touch of the seventh son can cure scrofula is still extensively believed in our north-west Highlands. I have seen more than one poor idiot, with strumous complications, for whom this magic touch had been sought.

The ceremony is simple. The hand of the mystic mortal is laid on the patient, "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, one God, who only works cures."¹ These words are often, but not always, used; and I am told that this is justified on the ground, that the virtue being God's gift, is exercised in his name.

I have often been assured, that when seven sons are born in succession, the parents consider themselves bound, if possible, to make a doctor

¹ The Lewis gentleman, to whom I have referred in other notes, here writes on the margin of the manuscript:—"It is customary in Lewis for the seventh son to give the patient a sixpenny piece with a hole in it, through which a string is passed. This the patient wears constantly round his neck. In the event of its being removed or lost, the malady breaks out again. I am not aware that they invoke the holy Trinity—probably some of them do. I have known adults resorting to a seventh son of not more than two years of age. A person caught hold of the bairnie's wrist, and applied his little hand to the patient's sore."

of the seventh. We have here nothing but a modification of the superstition under the influence of civilisation.

Dalyell¹ says, that seven is one of the chief mystical numbers of Scotland, but I have not often encountered it in the superstitions of our country. Three and nine are infinitely more common. It is undoubtedly, however, the chief mystical number of the East; and the origin of this, I think, is to be found in its strangely frequent occurrence in holy writ. In the same way we might account for its acquiring a mystic value in our own country; but I am inclined to think that the particular superstition now under consideration does not depend on the general value attached to the number seven. I think it more probable that it has its origin in the story of the seven sons of Sceva the Jew.² It is true that in this case the power of casting out evil spirits, in the name of Jesus, was claimed by all seven; and possibly this claim may have rested in some measure on the fact that they were *seven*. But it does not appear to me difficult to understand how the gift which the seven claimed came eventually to be regarded as the possession of the seventh alone. The story of these seven sons is told to an ignorant people, who, thinking the power claimed depended on this number, accord that power to such *seven brothers* as are born among them. But the six are born, yet have not the gift till the seventh comes. It is with him, in fact, that the gift appears. He brings it. It seems to me, then, a likely thing, that such a people would soon begin to acknowledge it only in him—the seventh—with whom it arrives.

In the "Secret Commonwealth," written by the Rev. Robert Kirk, minister of Aberfoyle, in 1691, at page 38 there is a speculation as to whether the mystic power of the seventh son may not have its origin in this, that "the parents of the Seventh child put forth a more eminent virtue to his production than to all the Rest, as being the certain Meridian and Hight to which their Vigour ascends, and from that furth have a graduall declyning into a Feebleness of the Bodie and its Production."

"Political and religious prejudices," says Quetelet in his Essay on Man, "appear to have been at all times favourable to the multiplication of the species; and great productiveness was considered as an unequi-

¹ Darker Superstitions of Scotland, 395.

² Acts xix. 13.

vocal proof of celestial benediction, and of a prosperous state ;” and in a foot-note, referring to this passage, he goes on to say, “ When a seventh son was born, it was customary for the Prince to hold it at the baptismal font. This practice has not become obsolete in Belgium ; and we might quote several examples, in which the magistrate, or one of his officers, has been the representative of the monarch in such cases.”

This superstition was common and old when Primrose wrote in 1639. He regarded it as an attempt of the devil to manifest, in his “ cursed Emissaries,” that wondrous power which “ is, by the blessing of God, granted to the Kings of Great Brittain and France, and denied to other Christian Kings.”¹ In this royal gift it is well known that Sir Thomas Browne, whose “ *Vulgar Errors*” were published in 1646, had a practical belief ;² yet had its full brother—the birth-right of the seventh son—been discussed by this learned man, I doubt not he also would have attributed it to “ Satan, the great promoter of false opinions.”³

EVIL EYE.

No superstition is more common in the north-west of Scotland than belief in the influence of the evil eye.

I saw a girl in U——, in whose case idiocy was attributed to this cause. An evil eye had fallen on her in childhood, and this was the result. Time and place were named with precision. The *gold and silver water* was, in her case, tried as a cure. A shilling and a sovereign were put into water, which was then sprinkled over her, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.⁴ So said her mother, a seemingly pious old woman, who told me, in all seriousness, that though her child’s mental health was still as bad as ever, her bodily health had been much improved.

In some districts of the north-west of Scotland, a very sudden or peculiar illness seldom occurs which is not submitted to this ceremony. I know persons who have frequently seen it practised.

¹ Primrose. *Popular Errors ; or, Errors of the People in matter of Physic.* Trans. by Wittie, 1651, p. 434.

² John Browne’s *Adenochoiredologia*, part 3, pp. 187, 189.

³ Sir T. Browne. Bohn’s edit., vol. i. p. 88.

⁴ In the parishes on the west of Ross-shire, in order to give greater efficacy, the water is taken from a rivulet through which a funeral procession has lately passed.

It is alleged, and I am inclined to think correctly, that in Lewis even some elders of the church have a firm belief in the evil eye and witchcraft.¹

CHARMS.

In the Lewis these are common, and are still much used, but more for the diseases of cattle than of men. I have presented to the Museum of Antiquities two which were recently in use. The sickness of cattle is sometimes ignorantly attributed to the bite of a serpent, and a Lewis correspondent informs me that the people make the diseased animals drink of water into which these charm stones are put, and that they swear to the cures thereby effected.

CHANGE OF NAME.

There is another curious superstition with reference to the prevention of insanity in a family where cases have already occurred, which I encountered in the Lewis. An effort is made to extirpate the tendency by the introduction of a new name into the family. I saw one case in which this had been tried without success.

CHANGELINGS. FAIRIES.

I saw at M——, in Uig, an emaciated, shrivelled, helpless idiot, a dwarf with that puzzling expression of face—a compound of senility and babyhood²—which is not rare. He is believed to be a changeling of the fairies, who are supposed to steal away the human child, and leave for it one of their own *young-old* children to be nursed. The only remedy for this of which I heard, is to place the changeling on the beach by the water side, when the tide is out, and pay no attention to its screams. The fairies, rather than suffer their own to be drowned by the rising waters, spirit it away, and restore the child they had stolen. The sign that this has been done is the cessation of the child's crying.

¹ The Lewis gentleman who annotated my manuscript here says:—"Most true. Dr Mitchell need not have a doubt on the point."

² I know two idiots in one of the Western Islands exactly of the same character, and also believed to be changelings of the fairies.

I shall here conclude this notice of some of the superstitions of the north-west Highlands and Islands of Scotland. They relate chiefly to lunacy, regarding the nature and management of which opinions still prevail which are far behind the kindly teachings of Pinel—far even behind the practice in the temples of Egyptian Saturn, if we may trust the following:—"A formula of worship was there proposed as a charm, and not as a moral medicine, and under this guise the crowds which frequented these shrines were engaged in a succession of healthful and amusing exercises; they were required to march in the beautiful gardens and to row on the majestic Nile; delightful excursions were planned for them, under the plea of pilgrimages. In short, a series of powerful and pleasing impressions was communicated at a time when the feelings were impressed with a most extravagant hope, and with perfect reliance upon the power whose pity every act was intended to propitiate. The priests triumphed, and the disease was subdued."¹ What else do our most advanced psychologists now recommend? Where is the new thing under the sun?²

But in no way wedded to wisdom, as in the foregoing, are the superstitions of the north-west Highlands of Scotland. On the contrary, they are intimately united to backwardness and ignorance. Had I not confined myself to the superstitions relating to lunacy, this would have been still more apparent. Erysipelas, for instance, to this day is cured by cutting off one-half of the ear of a cat, and letting the blood drop on the affected part. I have it on good authority, that within the last few years this was more than once tried in the parish of Lochcarron. The *abaidil*, a sort of colic to which cows on hill pasture are subject; is thus cured:—The first person who sees the suffering animal twists a rope against the sun, passes it round the cow's body, cuts it into three parts and burns it. An islander who in the morning encounters a snail on a bare rock with the tail to him, turns from it as from a prophet of evil, and goes home

¹ Quoted by O. W. Morris, from an author not named, in a paper in the 32d Report to the Legislature of New York on the New York Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, page 199.

² Even Esculapius is said to have relieved those "whose violent agitations of mind raised an intemperate heat in their bodies, with songs, farces, and musick."—*Le Clerc*, op. cit. 41.

again. I know a lady, who, when a child, labouring under hooping-cough, was passed three times under the belly of an ass, in the hope and belief that therefrom a cure would come. Warts are rubbed with a piece of beef, which is then buried with three barley-corns; when these rot the warts are expected to fall off. I know cases in which this has lately been done; and I could retail hundreds of similar childish superstitions presently practised.

Some of them we are sorry to find vanities. We mourn over their impotency. If the heart of a lapwing could really improve the intellect, warm the imagination, and sharpen the wit,¹ what a trade in lapwings would arise! What numbers of them we should all swallow! What wit and talent would fill the world! How glad the heart of the lapwing must be that it has no such mystic power, and that wisdom has detected the emptiness of the conceit.

If the chrysolite, bored through and filled up with the mane of an ass, could really "drive away all folly,"¹ who would want one about his person? The poor would be supplied with chrysolites either by the charitable or by the state. Wisdom would walk the streets, madness would be unknown, and the writer's occupation gone.

I trust that this communication may not lead to inferences more unfavourable to the people of the Highlands than the real state of the case warrants. As a rule, the superstitions in question are confined to the more ignorant; and perhaps, after all, it is not more difficult to understand an ignorant man's faith in the traditional value of "earding a quik cok in the grund" for the cure of epilepsy, than it is to understand the belief in spirit-rapping, which is not uncommon in our times, even among the more cultivated classes. The superstitious practices which I have described, necessarily illustrate the social condition of the people, but their chief interest lies in their being relics of antiquity; and as such they are here discussed. I have done what I could to secure accuracy, and I feel satisfied that all my statements will be found substantially correct. "*Si de veritate scandalum sumitur, utilius permittitur nasci scandalum, quam ut veritas relinquitur.*"²

¹ It is doubtful if these superstitions exist in Scotland.

² St Augustine.